

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

LOWER COLORADO RIVER BASIN PHASE I, TEXAS ONION CREEK COMPONENT

At the request of the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), and under authority of an May 6, 1998, resolution by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) conducted an Interim Feasibility-Level Report and Integrated Environmental Assessment to identify water and water-related land resource needs of the Onion and Williamson Creek floodplains within the Lower Colorado River Basin, Texas. The LCRA, in cooperation with the City of Austin, Travis County, the City of Sunset Valley, and with partial funding by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), provided non-Federal Sponsor support for the Onion Creek component of the Lower Colorado River Basin Phase I, Texas Project.

In order to evaluate a wide array of alternatives over a broad study area, areas of interest were identified based on historical reoccurring flood events. The areas identified for detailed investigation include the Timber Creek, Onion Creek Forest/Yarrabee Bend, Bluff Springs Road/Perkins Valley, Onion Creek Subdivision, Bear/Onion Confluence, and Williamson Creek. Structural, non-structural, combined multi-purpose and No Action alternatives were evaluated for the areas of interest. Structural alternatives evaluated included diversions, channel modifications, bench cutting, flood walls and levees. Non-structural alternatives included buyouts and raising structures in place. Ecosystem restoration alternatives included acquisition of property and native tree/shrub/grassland planting. In addition, recreation facilities would be added to some of the lands acquired for other project purposes. Combined multi-purpose alternatives provided combinations of the other alternatives.

No action is proposed in the Bluff Springs Road/Perkins Valley, Onion Creek Subdivision and Bear/Onion Confluence areas of interest because of the lack of sufficient economic justification to support Federal interest. The Recommended Plan for the Timber Creek and Onion Creek Forest/Yarrabee Bend areas of interest provides for the acquisition and removal of 81 and 410 residential structures, respectively in the 4% annual chance of exceedance (ACE) floodplain; permanent closure of several streets or parts thereof; restoration of 16 and 190 acres of land to riparian woodlands; and installation of recreation features such as picnic shelters, hiking trails, restrooms, and supporting infrastructure. The recommended plan for the Williamson Creek area of interest would consist of channel excavation on one side or the other to create a benched effect along approximately 8,500 linear feet of creek in four separate reaches. Restoration of 114 acres of land to riparian woodlands is also included.

The recommended plan has been reviewed in accordance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The Recommended Plan in Timber Creek and Onion Creek Forest/Yarrabee Bend would consist of buyouts and would not affect Waters of the United States. The Recommended Plan in Williamson Creek would impact approximately 15 acres and 6.02 Average Annual Habitat Units (AAHU) of riparian woodlands and impact 8,500 feet of Waters of the United States. Approximately 23 acres of mitigation is proposed, which would provide 7.22 AAHU of habitat and improve 4,000 feet of Waters of the United States.

Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, was considered during the development of the Recommended Plan. Materials removed from the project during construction would be placed in approved landfills for the types of materials involved. Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, was also considered and no impacts would occur to wetlands as a result of implementation of the Recommended Plan. Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice, was also considered during the development of the Recommended Plan. Low income and minority populations exist in the Timber Creek area of interest and would be affected by the Recommended Plan; however no other viable alternatives were identified that would solve the flooding problem exist. Relocation assistance would be provided to the displaced residents to aid them in finding alternate living arrangements.

Cultural resources compliance issues are undergoing consultation with the Texas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). No cultural resources would be impacted as a result of implementation of the Recommended Plan in the Timber Creek and Onion Creek Forest/Yarrabee Bend areas of interest. Since excavation of a bench is proposed along the banks of Williamson Creek, deep test trenching is needed for cultural resource analysis. Since the proposed project area is located in residential backyards, the test trenching has been delayed until detailed design so that trenching only occurs in actual construction areas. A programmatic agreement (PA) is being negotiated with the SHPO to ensure compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Recommended Plan has been coordinated with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and it has been determined that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

An Environmental Assessment has been completed for the Recommended Plan and its alternatives. Based upon review of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment and results of coordination, I have concluded that the recommended plan will not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. In addition, construction of the project will not constitute a major Federal action of sufficient magnitude to warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

Christopher W. Martin
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

Date